

VZCZCXRO0536

PP RUEHDU RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHKI #0926/01 2151227

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 031227Z AUG 07

FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6648

INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000926

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/02/2010

TAGS: PGOV KDEM CG ZA

SUBJECT: KABILA SECURITY ADVISER DIES UNEXPECTEDLY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Classified By: PolCouns DBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Presidential adviser Samba Kaputo, a key figure in Kabila-era politics, died in Johannesburg August 1, reportedly of kidney failure. He was Kabila's national security adviser during the Transition and a member of his trusted inner circle. He had close connections with the military and intelligence hierarchies and was a noted hardliner on Kivu issues. His death leaves a major gap at the Presidency and has generated furious speculation regarding possible replacements. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Guillaume Samba Kaputo, President Kabila's de facto national security adviser, died unexpectedly August 1 in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he had been flown the day before for emergency medical treatment. He was 61. His death leaves Kabila without one of his most powerful and influential advisers and has set off intense speculation about who will fill the gap.

¶3. (SBU) Prof Samba, as he was popularly known, was a former academic and Mobutu education minister who had become one of the Kabila era's key power-brokers. He was a native of Moba in northern Katanga, Kabila's home region and that of many of his inner circle. He was a hardliner often at odds with more moderate advisers. However, he acted as Kabila's chief negotiator during the presidential campaign and served as presidential representative dealing with forces loyal to former Vice President Bemba in the wake of violent clashes last year.

¶4. (U) Leaked information indicating the cause of death as kidney failure has appeared in the Kinshasa press. An August 2 account in the daily Le Palmares asserts Kaputo became noticeably ill on Sunday July 29, and was medevaced to Johannesburg on Kabila's plane late in the night of July 31, dying while undergoing treatment at approximately 1045 local time August 1.

¶5. (SBU) Kaputo has long been diagnosed as diabetic, although he reportedly took care to monitor his condition and maintain a prescribed diet regimen. Other members of the presidential staff have told us he had appeared increasingly fatigued in recent days, began missing appointments, and generally showed signs of growing health problems. Foreign Minister Mbisa Nyamwisi reported that Kaputo's hands and wrists appeared swollen during recent meetings, a classic sign of kidney malfunction that can accompany diabetes. Kabila adviser Augustin Katumba indicated that by the weekend, it appeared Kaputo was not eating, and Katumba suggested that Kaputo had allowed his health to deteriorate too far before seeking medical help. By Tuesday, July 31, an

alarmed Kabila reportedly arranged for Kaputo to be transported to South Africa for medical treatment. Inevitably, however, rumors have already been circulating in Kinshasa of various versions of foul play involved in Kaputo's death. An autopsy is being arranged in South Africa as a part of the effort to put such stories to rest.

¶ 16. (SBU) Kaputo had officially resigned from his presidency functions when elected to the National Assembly in 2006 elections, as required by the DRC constitution. The presidency's official announcement of his death included news of a July 28 decree nominating him to the same national security position he had previously occupied. He had recently resigned his Assembly seat to resume officially the national security position, although neither the July 28 decree nor Kaputo's assembly resignation had been yet officially announced. In fact, Kaputo had continued to act as a presidential adviser on an unofficial basis without interruption.

¶ 17. (C) Presidential Political and Diplomatic Counselor Marcellin Cishambo told the Ambassador August 2 that Kaputo's widow was traveling immediately from the U.S., where she had been living, to South Africa. Following the autopsy, she would accompany her late husband's body to Kinshasa, probably this weekend. A funeral could be held as early as Monday, August 6, although arrangements have not yet been finalized.

¶ 18. (C) Comment. It is impossible at this point to say who may take Kaputo's place, but fallout from his death will continue to be felt for some time. He had ties to many named to key positions in the recent military and intelligence reshuffle and was reportedly a major player in their nominations. Their future influence is much harder to gauge

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with their patron now out of the picture. Kaputo was well-known as a hardliner generally, and specifically regarding issues related to Rwanda, and renegade General Nkunda. It is too early to gauge, however, whether his absence will shift the general tenor and balance of sentiment within the presidency. For now, the presidency operation, never particularly efficient, has effectively ground to a halt as President Kabila and the inner circle of advisers deal with the unexpected shock of Kaputo's death, and required funeral and other arrangements. End comment.
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